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ABSTRACT

The crucial elements of control which have developed in the educational systems of the U.S. are: (1) the collective social power of government to require participation in formal education and to stipulate the conditions of that participation (i.e., legal control); (2) the authority to make and the power to enforce decisions that appropriate resources from the society at large and allocate them to the educational sector (taxing authority or fiscal control); (3) the authority to create educational organizations in which performance expectations and role relationships are specified (creation of school districts, certification standards, and curricular components); (4) the authority to legitimatize a sequence of learning experiences to constitute a curriculum or educational program (parent and/or community control). Self-determination, control, parental involvement, and educational relevance constitute the necessary components of improved education for American Indians. Specifically, Indian students need programs in which: their culture is valued; their language is recognized; their special needs are met; and they feel comfortable and involved. Recent Federal legislation has rejected the paternalistic policies of the past and substituted Indian self-determination, but cultural differences must be recognized in the educational curriculum, textbooks, and class offerings. (JC)

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St. Paul, Minnesota

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The late sixties and early seventies may have the most significant impact on the lives of America's first inhabitants, the American Indian, than any other period of time during the history of the United States. Self-determination, though no new philosophy, has generated a brighter future for American Indians. While problems and issues are no longer difficult to discover, the real challenge now appears to be, "how to solve problems and resolve issues." This paper will address itself to Indian control of their schools, one of the crucial issues facing educators and Indian communities today. While it appears to fit in the total self-determination effort, there are obvious pitfalls and problems which will require careful planning and understanding before the issue can be resolved.

This paper should be examined in a limited context. It is intended to draw attention to school administrators some fundamental issues related to Indian control of education affecting Indian children and indicate to the Indian community some parameters which must be considered if real self-determination shall prevail.

Control is a fairly simple word, but when used with the description of "community" or "Indian" has both practical and emotional overtones. Control is not, as some perceive it, an indivisible entity. Control is a continuum and persons or groups may have a lot of control or very little control. I contend that no one could have or possibly would want to have 100% control. That would be counter-productive. Control has grown to be a democratic concept like freedom and responsibility that needs to be shared to maximize benefits and/or productivity.

In the discussion of control, I will first discuss degrees of control, then types of control and some hazards associated with control. Keep in mind that we are discussing Indian control and in particular Indian control in education. This is the facet of control that most interests educators and school superintendents. Administrative teams, decentralization and parent advisory committees are all methods of sharing the control, involving the interested persons and reflecting a growing concern for relevance and responsibility.

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The crucial elements of control in the educational systems that have developed in the United States are:

(1) The collective social power of government to require participation in formal education and to stipulate the conditions of that participation. This is legal control and is vested in state legislatures and the United States Congress. It involves such things as state legislation of compulsory attendance and specification of age levels for whom educational resources can be expended. Legal control usually resides in the states and could not be pre-empted by parental or community groups. That is: Indian control would have to observe the legal requirements that pertain to all citizens of the United States.

(2) A second element of control is the authority to make and the power to enforce decisions that appropriate resources from the society at large and allocate them to the educational sector. This is taxing authority or fiscal control. Again this control is often exercised by legislatures or Congress or restricted by the tax base in the school district. However, how available funds are allocated is somewhat discretionary and local groups need to exercise some control in the dispensation of funds which affect the education of their children. Administrators are well aware that control of the budget is a source of great power. However, it also involves a large degree of responsibility. Given the fiscal restraints of most school budgets, the degree of control here may be minimal; i.e. so much of the budget is devoted to fixed expenses that very little of it could be constructed as discretionary money for such things as innovation, program development or curriculum reform.

However, parents, community and Indian groups need to be informed of tax laws, budgetary procedures and disbursement of funds. A little education can be a dangerous thing in the matters of budget. Administrative teams, parent advisory groups and community persons need to be fully informed of budget restraints and taxing authority. In the battle of inflation, recession and declining enrollments, this knowledge and involvement becomes even more imperative.

(3) A third type of control is the authority to create educational organizations in which performance expectations and role relationships are specified. This type of authority or control is illustrated in the creation of school districts, certification standards, and curricular components. Both private and public schools must adhere to the rules governing certification, basic curricular offerings and length of school year. However, private groups such as Indian tribes or Indian corporations could set up their own schools. Control of these schools would be governed by the same legal restraints of certification standards, curricular offerings and time components, as are all other public and private schools.

(4) The fourth type of control is the authority to legitimatize a sequence of learning experiences to constitute a curriculum or educational program. In this area of curricular offerings, parent and community groups can exercise the greatest degree of control. Though there are

state mandated minimum subject requirements, there is a large degree of flexibility and innovation allowed in program offerings. This is the area with which Indian parents are usually concerned. They recognize the limits of control as far as legal restraints, taxing authority, budgetary management, and state standards. However, it is the curriculum which vitally concerns Indian parents and the area where they seek involvement, input, innovation and change.

As The First Report to the President of the United States: 1972 explains: "The subcommittee anticipates that few, if any, Native communities will want to assume the absolute degree of control conveyed with all the elements described above. Most Native (American) people .... have not talked in terms of a degree of control that would make schools responsive to the needs of their children at the local community level."

Program control is possible through enabling legislation at either the state or national level. Since Native Americans are largely the responsibility of the federal government most of the enabling legislation of recent years has been at the federal level. Two instances of this were the allocation of Johnson O'Malley funds directly to tribes for the assistance of Indian children and the Title IV (PL 92-318) Act which allocates federal dollars to all school districts which have ten or more Indian children. In both cases (JOM & Title IV) these programs involve parent input, parental involvement and parental control. These two pieces of legislation have probably done more to return control of Indian education to Indian parents than any other previous legislation. Now it is up to the school administration, the parent committee and the staff to cooperate fully and develop viable and relevant educational programs for Indian students.

As was mentioned earlier, there are hazards associated with control. Some of the pitfalls of community control involve a basic understanding of what control is or how much control is possible. The parent committees have legal justification, but very little opportunity to change the laws that govern school districts everywhere. That is, their input is important, their ideas are needed, but they cannot overrule the laws which govern education. They must adhere to the law, to legal taxing requirements, live within their budget allocation and observe certification standards. These restraints should be clear to all groups which have or seek control of educational matters. Rarely can an Indian parent group hire or fire indiscriminately. However, they do have some flexibility in interviewing candidates for positions, in suggesting persons for vacancies and in assisting in the recruitment of Indian personnel for Indian programs.

As the report previously cited[2] advises:

"Focusing attention on Native control of education as an end in itself should not be allowed to obscure basic operational problems in providing meaningful learning experiences for Native children.

Special Education Subcommittee of the National Council on Indian Opportunity, Between Two Milestones: The First Report to the President of the United States. November 30, 1972.

2 Ibid. Page 26-27

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There is an acute shortage of Native people trained as teachers, counselors, and administrators. Native children need and deserve the skills of highly qualified educational professionals. Native assumption of educational control does not necessarily mean the employment of an all-Native staff. Native communities can exercise policy control of their schools and still employ both Native and non-native personnel.

Answers to all the problems of Native education will not be found within the local community. The Native-controlled schools need the help and support of other agencies such as colleges, universities, and state departments of education. Their contributions in the area of curriculum development, home-school relations, counseling, special education, and administration are needed in Native communities which have not had extensive experience in the management of educational opportunity.

Self-determination could become a form of termination. The total society might use the rhetorical appeal of Native control of Native education as a ploy to reduce federal, state, and local responsibility for the education of the Native children.

While these potential dangers are real, Native people should not let them stand in the way of seeking and exercising the degree of local control or participation they desire in educational management. Fear of obstacles and failure should generate caution and thoughtfulness, but not paralysis. Native people have a right to make mistakes and learn from them as they seek to gain a greater degree of local control in education."

Control is terribly important to Native American people. It is implied in the term of "self-determination" and is a rallying call for all Native American people. It is difficult for white Americans to appreciate the total absence of self-determination that existed in the lives of Indian people. The Native Americans were granted citizenship and the right to vote in 1929. Before that time Indians were considered subject peoples (or worse-savages) who must be allocated a daily subsistence level of food, some clothing and an education that would assimilate them into the mainstream of American life. The idea was to de-Indianize the red man and make him fit the "American" stereotype. It is a tribute to the stamina, strength and integrity of Indian people and Indian culture that the Indian persisted and still retains their "Indianess". Though the Indians had no possessions, very little land, and a dismal future, they kep that which was most precious to them: an Indian culture that sustained them in adversity.

The Meriam Report of 1928 recognized the need for self-determination. It stated:

"In every activity of the Indian service the primary question should be, how is the Indian to be trained so that he will do this for himself? Unless this question can be clearly and definitely answered by

an affirmative showing of distinct educational purpose and method, the chances are that the activity is impeding rather than helping the advancement of Indian people."[3]

Forty years later the same assessments were being made: Indians must be allowed a larger measure of self-determination. Self-determination (and control) were essential to a healthy self-concept, to educational achievements, to self-sufficiency and to full citizenship in the system. Former President Nixon stated (in 1969):

"The time has come to break decisively with the past and to create the conditions for a new era in which (the Indian future is determined by Indian acts and Indian decisions."[4]

Lyndon Johnson, a year earlier, but still 40 years after the Meriam Report, listed "freedom of choice" as a goal for Native Americans and recommended "Full participation in (the) life of modern America, with a full share of economic opportunity and social justice".[5]

These quotes are meant to emphasize the need for self-determination in the lives of Native Americans and to further emphasize the need for control in the educational program provided Indian children in public schools. White American institutions and White American schools have failed dismally in the education of Indian students. Drop-out rates are high; (at least twice those for white students) achievement levels are low: self concept scores are low and truancy is high. Various studies from Dr. Karl Marburger,[6] James Coleman,[7] Madison Coombs,[8] and Willard Bass[9] have confirmed these findings. Most schools cannot or do not meet the educational needs of Native American students. This is not through malice or intent to discriminate (though those exist too) but largely because of a lack of understanding and a failure to relate to Indian needs. Indian students were, in better circumstances, "overlooked" or ignored (on the premise that they must "adapt") or in worse circumstances, isolated and "pushed out" of the educational institutions.

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3 Lewis Merriam, The Problem of Indian Administration. Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1928. P. 21

4 U. S., President, 1969 (Nixon), Recommendations for Indian Policy: Message 91st Congress, 2nd Session, House Document #91-363. Washington: Government Printing Office, July 8, 1970. P. 1

5 U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Sub-Committee on Indian Education, Indian Education, 1969, Hearing 91st Congress, 1st Session Part 1, February 18, 19, 24, 1969. Washington, Government Printing Office, 1969. P 349.

6 Ibid. P. 314

7 James S. Coleman et al, Equality of Educational Opportunity. Washington, D. C. U. S. Government Printing Office, 1966. P. 20-21

8 Madison Coombs, The Educational Disadvantages of the Indian American Student. Educational Resources Information Center, Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. Las Cruces, New Mexico. New Mexico State University, July 1970. P. 26

9 Willard Bass, An Analysis of Academic Achievement of Indian High School Students in Federal and Public Schools - First Year Progress Report. Albuquerque, Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory, Inc.,1968 P.20

This then is the thread that unites self-determination, control, parental involvement and relevance in the schools. They are necessary components in the improvement of education for Indian students, and the resolution of problems. Indians must be in charge of their own destiny. This is basic to the development of a positive self concept and the improvement of achievement levels. Parents are vitally concerned and knowledgeable about the needs of their own children and deserve a larger role in the development of programs for their children. Parents who are involved, concerned, and confident in their ability to exercise some control in their children's educational life, inspire children to attend, achieve and reap the benefits that real education has to offer.

Indian students need programs in which (1) their culture is valued and esteemed, (2) their language is recognized, (3) their special needs are met and (4) they feel comfortable and involved. It is not an overwhelming task that is placed in the hands of American administrators. Most of us have accepted the concept of individual differences. We need to take that concept one step further and recognize cultural differences and ethnic needs. Beyond the recognition of culture differences we need to reflect these differences in curriculum, textbooks and class offerings. Parents can be of great assistance in clarifying needs, developing programs and providing volunteer services.

National policies have recently begun to reflect the need for Indian control in Indian affairs. These policies became known as self-determination without termination. The idea was self-determination for Indian people without the threat of termination of responsibility. Termination was morally and legally unacceptable since the federal government must insure the idea of self-determination and accept the moral responsibility for the present depressing conditions among many Indian people.

With the adoption of self-determination as a national policy, the suffocating pattern of paternalism was rejected. Paternalism has stifled Indian initiative and thwarted viable solutions to persistent problems. Indian adults and children have finally gained the right to have a voice in their own affairs.

Self-determination and the rejection of former paternalistic policies was the motive which inspired the Congress of the United States to pass an amended Johnson O'Malley Law which placed the authority for the funds in the hands of the Indian recipients. The same intent underscored the passage of Title IV Indian Education Act. These acts established parent committees with authority and also established the National Advisory Council on Indian Education which is composed of 15 Indian educators who establish policy, make recommendations and select candidates for the office of Deputy Commissioner for Indian Education. With two broad sweeps, Indian people have the promise of self-determination, self-respect and equality in educational matters.

Similar guaranties have been reflected in other recent legislation and Supreme court Decisions. In Morton versus Mancari, a Supreme Court Decision of 1974, Indian preference in the Bureau of Indian Affairs was upheld. Non-Indians had begun the suit, charging that the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 had outlawed preferential treatment based

on race, creed or color. The Court in its decision noted that Indian people were more of a political identity than a racial identity and that Indian relationships with the Bureau of Indian Affairs were upheld and legitimized.

There is a persistent and psychological need among all people to be the masters of their own destiny. The United States of America was born of this need to be free, independent and unencumbered by foreign interference. We see this need manifested in Black demands for equal opportunity, in alternative educational programs for alienated youth and in persistent clamors for local control of schools and accountability.

Paternalism leaves scars on the psychological well being of dependent people - Black, White, Oriental or Indian. The growth of a healthy self-concept demands that paternalism be replaced by self-determination. Self-respect, initiative and mental health are difficult to maintain in a climate of paternalistic subjugation.

It appears to me that nothing could be more appropriate than an American bi-centennial effort to right the wrongs suffered by Native Americans for the past 200 years. American educators need to unite and accept the challenges of Indian education. The unique and positive contributions of Native Americans need not only acceptance but appreciation in the classrooms of America. Indian parents can play a viable and dynamic role in setting policies, upgrading education and reversing the trend of drop-outs, failures, poverty and unemployment. The means are not complicated, the funds are available; only the initiative is needed. Indian people can provide that initiative. With the help of educators a new era can begin that would enhance the 200th birthday of this nation and pay tribute to the first Americans who have never been granted their rightful place in the nation's history.

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